Transitions

By 1947, World War II was over. Frank had not been back very long from his self-imposed exile, before he began planning the next money-making scheme. That, of course, included his son.

"He pulled me out of school permanently. I had to go work for him, doin the same crap, (but) now I was on my own. I had orders of what I had to do."

At this time Bobby recalls the worst argument he ever had with his father. Frank was pushing him to start his own drug distribution business there in Trinidad. The years Frank spent in Mexico most likely put him in touch with eager suppliers. The promise of easy money could not entice young Bobby into a life of crime.

"We got into a very severe argument, dealing with setting up a drug (selling ring). He wanted me to make one. I told him to go to hell…. I ran crying all the way to town."

Frustrated and angry, he didn't know what to do. Once in town, he trudged along the store fronts, staring at the sidewalk. Was this his lot in life, now that his father was back in their lives? All the guidance and training he received from his aunts and uncles; not that arrow making was something he could earn a living with; was that all for nothing? What about the ceremony he was put through to bring him into manhood? Plus, the spirit name his elders decided to bestow upon him – Straight Arrow – how could he live up to that honor, on this path his dad wanted him to take? He had been doing much better in school while his dad was in Mexico. He was no longer a straight F student.

Picking his head up to implore the heavens, Bobby's eyes fell upon the bright US Army poster in a store window. Join the Army and get an Education! This had to be a sign from the Great Spirit! This could solve his problems! But how?

Bobby knew the minimum age was 17, yet he was sure he could pass as being older than he was. Bobby dashed towards Main and Commercial, where the recruiter's office was located. He stopped first at the Savoy Café, one of his dad's regular haunts. Leaning nonchalantly at the entrance door, he stepped inside and poked through an ash tray. On a table nearest the door, he was looking for some spent matchsticks. He then proceeded quickly through the smoky, grease laden café to the bathroom at the back. Quickly he rubbed the match head over his upper lip. The dark soot matched his wavy black hair, so Bobby became a little more confident in the lie he had to tell.

The muscle bound, gravel voiced sergeant invited Bobby to have a seat in his neat, functional office. They introduced themselves and the sergeant was having a hard time keeping a straight face, as he glanced at Bobby's upper lip. Still the sergeant remained cordial and answered the boy's questions. Even after assuring the recruiter, he was the required minimum age of 17, Bobby was given a handful of forms. They were to be filled out and signed by his parents, for permission to join the military.

After leaving the recruiter's office, Bobby was overwhelmed by the requirements he faced. He absently wiped his nose on his shirt sleeve, depositing a long black smudge. He still didn't know what to do…

Still reeling from the fight with his dad and the roadblock of parental consent, Bobby decided to ask for advice from a trusted friend: Dr. Lee J. Beshaw.

Bobby walked 2 blocks to reach the doctor's office and settled into a seat in his waiting room. He waited until all the patients had left, before asking to talk to Dr. Beshaw. He had known Bobby most all his life and knew of the problems the boy faced at home. Bobby poured out all the events of the day: the reason for the fight with his dad, the recruiter's office, and the insurmountable requirement of parental consent. Dr. Beshaw reached over to Bobby's face and rubbed his thumb over the boy's cheek; suddenly amused and at the same time relieved, the dark smudge was not a bruise.

Together they hatched a plan to give young Bobby a chance for a decent life…

Dr. Beshaw enlisted the help of his niece, and together they forged the signatures needed on the recruiter's forms. Confident Frank would not admit to soliciting his son to become a drug dealer, Dr. Beshaw and his niece acted as Bobby's parents. Together they escorted Bobby to the recruiter's office with the proper forms. Then watched as the boy was sworn in there at the office. Bobby was told to report back later in the week for transport to Basic Training in Colorado Springs.

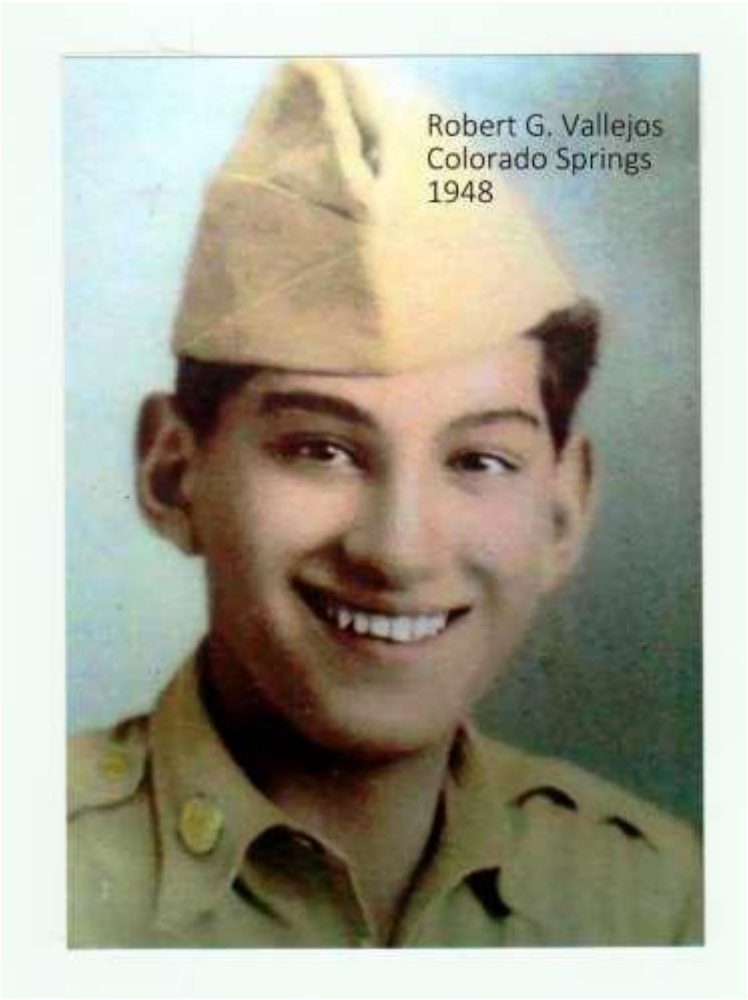
So far so good. Now to create a diversion that would let Bobby catch that bus. About an hour before the bus was to departure, Dr. Beshaw hired Frank to cut his lawn. Bobby in the meantime cleared some brush from the back of the doctor's house. Knowing Frank's weakness for fire water, the good doctor offered him a glass of 'fancy pants wine.' Curious to try the tastes of the upper crust, Frank was happy to oblige. Being unfamiliar with this new hooch, the added 100% grain alcohol Dr. Beshaw put into the glass was not questioned.

"He gave him a good snort of that, and put in some Thunderbird, the way he used to mix his drinks."

From the gingerbread front porch, Dr. Beshaw watched Frank push the mower slower and slower.

"He mowed about 2 rows and all of a sudden, he just laid down and passed out. I was on my way to a new home!"

The timing was perfect. Bobby boarded the Greyhound bus and was on his way to basic training in Colorado Springs, Colorado.


Robert G. Vallejos
Colorado Springs
1948